

ofay, during his " Figaro " campaign, revengefully described the book as " the attempt of an illiterate individual to lower literature to his own level." ¹ The general public did not take very kindly to the work. With " Pot-Bouille " there had at least been a moment when a very large sale had seemed probable, but the demand for "Au Bonheur des Dames" was distinctly moderate, and the wiseacres of the bookselling world opined that Zola, after going up like a rocket, might presently come down like a stick. It is true that the sudden and melodramatic death of Gambetta a short time previously (December 31, 1882) had left the French political world in some confusion; and it is known that the bookselling trade invariably suffers when there is any political unrest. Yet the conditions of the time did not sufficiently explain the drop in the demand for Zola's writings.

Goncourt, who met him a short time after the publication of "Au Bonheur des Dames," found him lugubrious. "The big sales are all over," said he, in much the same tone as a Trappist might have ejaculated the customary greeting, "Brother, one must die." Nevertheless, though he had several excellent subjects in his mind, — books which under favourable circumstances might well have compelled a renewal of public attention, — he deliberately postponed them,

and turned to a work which he must have known would appeal to only a small audience, that study of suffering, egotism, and sacrifice which he called satirically "La Joie de Vivre," and which he had put aside in 1881.

After all, in his estimation apparently, it mattered little what book he took in hand, for as he remarked to Goncourt at the Comedie Francaise on the night of the revival of

* Scherer's "Etudes sur la Littérature Contemporaine," Vol. VII, p. 240.